



CAT

By Bastet

CHRONICLES

A Collection of Short Stories from John Parham

The Old Man and the
Three-Legged Goat



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Cat Chronicles by Bastet Collection

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The Old Man and the Three Legged Goat

It was a cold fall morning and the trees were shedding their coats. The sky cranked up its brilliance as if awakening for the cool fall. For me, I loved my park bench, where I could sip my coffee and look at the crystal blue sky and far across the ruffled lake to the city.

I tried to sit at my bench at least once a week, on good days more often. Life has twists and turns and I have had more twists lately than turns. Peggy moved out and left me, my job became not and now here I sit on my park bench. I sipped my hot coffee and looked at the blue sky and wondered what had happened to my life.

Lonely, broke and soon to be homeless, I had some refuge from life on the park bench. This was my domain today, a big blue sky outlined by trees shaking the summer out of their heads. My park bench and my time, just me and my thermos of hot coffee.

Sitting here and letting my confused emotions escape to the blue sky I attempt to find some answers to life. Although at 26 still young but on my own. All of my family for some cruel twist of fate had been lost for several years.

No hope for the future and lonely I sipped my coffee and weighed my options for tomorrow and beyond. I know today is but a pipe dream with the clean and chilly air desperately trying to revive my spirit.

I took another sip of coffee and watched an old man shuffle by with wearing a trench coat with a fedora and smoking a pipe. He shuffled a few yards, hesitated, turned around and came back toward me.

I didn't really want to have my remorseful day interrupted. But Mr. Interruption apparently was coming my way regardless of my wishes. My caring parents, and how I miss them so, brought me up to be polite so I asked "May I help you?"

He halted a couple feet from the bench and replied "Excuse me sir, but perhaps you may have seen a three legged goat pass by?"

On any other day that might have sounded strange but today it fit right in. Here I sit all broken hearted and feeling sorry for myself but jerked back to reality. A three legged goat, who has a three legged goat for a pet Curly wondered.

"No sir I am afraid I have not" I replied. I looked more closely at the old man with little wisps of breath floating away when he breathed out to the cold air.

I felt sorry for him for some reason and asked "Would you like a cup of hot coffee and sit with me for a bit?"

He walked up, extended his hand and said "Pleased to meet you, I am Bartholomew Jackson."

I shook his cold hard hand and replied "Nice to meet you, they call me Curly Bama." "Please sit and I will pour you a cup of coffee then tell me about the three legged goat." I had brought a full thermos of coffee with me since it was one of few luxuries I could still afford.

Bartholomew gently folded onto the park bench and seated himself. I poured the coffee into the thermos cap and handed it to him. He said "Bless you Curly, I was actually freezing looking for Rambo." He then took a long sip of the hot coffee.

I sat there and looked long and hard at him and realized I liked him. Not sure why since I met him only five minutes ago, but he made me feel secure for some reason. It reminded me of my mom picking me up with a scraped knee saying "Everything is going to be okay" and I believed her.

That is what I felt with Bartholomew sitting next to me. Uncomfortable yet it gave me a warm, relaxed feeling I had missed for so long. "So Bartholomew what is the story on the three legged goat?" I asked.

He turned to me and held the thermos metal cup between his calloused hands. He said "Rambo saved my life and I must find him." "I am indebted to do so, besides he is my life companion."

Bartholomew looked across the lake with a great sadness. He turned to me and said "Once I would go to the mountains in search for gold." "I really never expected to find any, but it kept me busy as I did not have any family or kin to visit."

"Some days I got lucky and found gems, usually agates, turquoise, amethyst and such." He perked up and said "I sold some gems for a pretty penny I must tell you!"

"Anyway one fine day I went way deeper in the mountains and figured I would find the mother lode of something." "I scrambled across a particularly rough and steep ravine when I slipped and fell." "I landed at the bottom of the ravine, struck a rock then all went black."

"It was like I was swimming in a fish bowl looking out to see within." "Do you know what I mean?" he asked.

I shook my head in agreement but never really had any experience in a fish bowl.

He continued "I lay unconscious for a long time and was brought back to life by a loud bleating sound." "I thought I was delirious and attempted to shut it out but heard it again only louder this time."

"I forced my eyes open and a black goat stared at me with a white patch on his forehead." "I attempted to sit up, fell back and tried one more time." "This time the goat assisted me by pulling on my sleeve to help get me up."

"I unsteadily got on my knees and the goat scooted under my arm for an assist." "I finally stood up on my jelly legs." "I did a slow turn to take inventory of where I was but still in too much a fog to know."

"The goat bleated rapidly and walked five or ten yards then came back to me and repeated." "After a few times even in my addled mind, I began to understand he wanted me to follow him."

"The goat lead me out the ravine and near the exit hidden behind some large boulders was a natural spring." "By then of course I understood what he was doing and tried to lead me to water."

“I fell face first into the life giving spring.” “It was an extremely hot day and had not noticed how dehydrated I was since knocked unconscious.” “I drank deeply of the cool sweet water and began to revive somewhat.”

“My savior the goat laid before me and stared at me with his crazy eyes.” “The eyes were a cool blue with glittering sparkles in them.” “In fact Curly, if you gaze into my hazel eyes you may see the same golden flecks.”

Curly focused on the old man's eyes and sure enough he saw the golden flecks. He thought this was one weird story but also thought he felt better to have listened to Bartholomew's story. “So, what happened next to you and the goat?” Curly asked. He refilled the old man's coffee cup since he had quickly drank the coffee.

The old man took a sip and continued. “I began to feel much better and was able to stand up with sturdier legs.” “Other than some crusted blood on my forehead I actually felt great.” I looked down at the goat and asked “Where to now?”

The goat bleated a couple times and started down the ravine. Every couple minutes he would stop, look back and bleat again. “Oh, so you want me to follow you, right?” I said. “You know I fell off a cliff, not a turnip truck!” So I followed him. Several minutes later we walked out of the ravine and came to a place with small shrubs. The goat, and at this time he had not yet been Christened Rambo, began to sniff and investigate the shrubs.

All I could see was Rambo's hindquarters as he poked through the dense shrubs. Then I heard a sound I will never forget. There was a loud clang then a sickening bone crunching sound. Rambo screamed, not like a goat more like a mother losing her only begotten child.

I immediately rushed best I could the 50 yards to find Rambo's leg caught in a wolf trap. His left leg was nearly severed and his tongue flopped wildly around his mouth as he squealed. I opened the trap to free him and wrapped his limp body in my coat.

I tried to staunch the bleeding leg best I could and left that cold hearted ravine. When we exited the ravine, I knew where we were and carried Rambo the two miles to my truck. I placed Rambo in the passenger side floorboard and drove as quickly as I could to connect with US 69.

I turned left and headed to Dumas as fast as the old truck would go. Rambo was laying in a growing pool of blood and I prayed Dumas would have a vet. I was confident they would since it was a small mid-size town. And sure enough I found the Dumas Animal Hospital on Main Street and pulled into the parking lot screeching to a halt.

I picked Rambo up from the floorboard and was terrified he was dead. He had lost so much blood and felt like a limp stuffed animal. Here is where I caught a break, I believe the greatest vet in the world worked at that animal hospital that day and she immediately saw Rambo due to his weak condition.

Dr. Jessica Ellen went right to work on Rambo. She placed him a small room and prepped him for surgery to address his wound. I waited in the lobby for what seemed like an eternity. She advised me before the surgery that the chances of Rambo surviving were slim but she would try her best.

After what seemed like hours she came out, looked at me and said “You have one tough Billy Goat Mr. Jackson!” “The surgery went well but I had to amputate the rest of his limb. The good news is goats adapt very quickly to missing limbs and I expect for him to recover.”

I did not know what to say, I had only met the Billy Goat a few hours earlier. But I felt a *binding* with him, there was just something special he had and I felt it. I thanked Dr. Ellen profusely, paid my bill and drove around back to pick up the goat.

I gently placed the goat on the seat this time since he was wrapped in a blanket and not bleeding. He was still under sedation from the surgery. Dr. Ellen had taken time to create a list of things I needed to pick up for the goat with care instructions.

I glanced down in the floorboard and a thick pool of blood was slowly congealing. I did not worry about cleaning up the blood and thought I would take care of it later. I stopped on the way home for the necessary supplies as instructed by Dr. Jessica Ellen to take care of the goat. When I got back to the truck to continue home, I said to the still sleeping goat “I shall name you Rambo because you are one tough goat!”

Curly asked “Did you have anywhere to keep him at your place?”

Bartholomew replied “No, but I thought I could make something work. I had a large back porch, and a fenced backyard.” He continued with his story after taking another sip of coffee.

I made a makeshift bed for Rambo on the back porch. I thought he would be safe enough there, and the weather was hot with warm nights. I checked on Rambo every few hours to make sure he had plenty of water and the prescribed food.

A couple days later I sat on the porch and Rambo bleated and struggled to rise. That caught me by surprise and he then staggered over and rubbed his head against my knee. He was still wobbled with only one front leg but it did not take him long to discover centering his front leg would allow him to gain stability. No more rock wall climbing but good enough.

The days went by and our *binding* became much stronger. I rarely played the state lotto but for some reason sitting on the porch with Rambo I had the urge to buy a ticket. I made sure Rambo was okay and drove to the local Quick Stop and purchased a million dollar lotto ticket.

The next day I discovered I won the lottery! I celebrated with Rambo and swear he winked at me for my great fortune. I took some proceeds and had a small cottage made for him in the backyard with automated food and water dispensers.

We were both happy and sat on the porch and enjoyed life. I was now rich beyond my wildest desires and Rambo chewed on his favorite cans. Life was ideal, my health was even improving and Rambo was strong and playful.

Then late one night a huge thunderstorm passed over with damaging winds. The winds knocked down the fence and Rambo reacted only naturally and fled. That was two days ago and I have yet to find him.

Curly felt immensely sad for the lonely man and could relate to loneliness. He too just lost someone so sympathized with Bartholomew.

"I do wish there was something I could do for you Bartholomew" Curly said. "Would you like for me to go with you to find Rambo, I have nothing else to do today, or tomorrow for that matter."

Bartholomew looked at Curly and handed him the coffee cup back and said "No Curly, this is my quest. And you have been kind enough to offer a cold old man a cup of hot coffee and listen to his story."

"Thank you for your kindness Curly I shall go alone," Bartholomew said. "But here is my card in case you happen to see Rambo. I would like to give you a \$100 for caring and offering help to find Rambo."

Curly held his hand up and said "No, you don't owe me anything, I wish I could do more for you." Although a hundred dollars would be a small fortune now to Curly. He thought it would not be right to take his money in time of grief, he just was not raised that way.

Bartholomew replied "I bought this lotto ticket the other day before Rambo escaped and have not bothered to check on it." "At least accept this, it probably is not worth anything but who knows until you check it?"

Bartholomew handed his card with the lotto ticket wrapped around it to Curly. He retrieved his wallet and placed the card and ticket in it and said to Bartholomew "I really hope you find Rambo and the best of luck, you are a good and caring person."

Bartholomew smiled at Curly and shook his hand warmly, pulled his fedora lower, lit his pipe and continued on his search. Curly decided it was time to head back to his apartment and ponder what to do for his future.

The next day Curly woke late in the morning and knew he had about a week before he would be on the street. He looked into the mirror for answers but found none, only a lonely and sad face staring back at him. He pulled out his wallet to take the inventory of his financial situation.

He laid the contents on the table and counted out \$35 dollars. That's it he thought, my entire fortune and savings. What to do he wondered, what to do. While he fretted over his situation, he glanced in his wallet and saw Bartholomew's card, he realized he had never read it.

He extracted the card from the wallet, removed the lotto ticket and read the inscription. He expected to see a name and maybe address or phone number, but what he read baffled him.

The card simply said "Bartholomew Jackson - Angel of Life-Savior of Souls" That was all on it except for a picture of Bartholomew wearing his fedora with his pipe and Rambo. Curly thought Bartholomew was a little different, but this was more than his fragile psyche could handle right now.

He then picked up and unfolded the million dollar lotto ticket. The draw date was two days ago, so he thought what the hell and would check it. The winning numbers he found on the internet and were 2-8-23-26-49-52. Curly casually looked at the lotto ticket numbers. He had a double take as his heart began to race since his lotto ticket had 2-8-23-26-49-52.

"Holy cow!" Curly shouted at the top of his lungs. "Bartholomew gave me a winning million dollar lotto ticket!"

Curly jumped up so fast he nearly passed out when he heard a strange sound out his open window. He staggered over to the window left open for the breeze and heard the strange sound again. The sound was like a woman screaming or something he thought.

He looked down at the sidewalk beneath his window and saw an old man wearing a fedora with a pipe. And next to him was a three legged goat and both looked up at him. The old man tweaked his fedora at Curly and the goat pranced once then they both turned left and disappeared around the corner.

Curly yelled down to them “Wait, please wait” but it was too late they were gone.

He ran down the stairs as fast as he could, turned right and spun around the corner. A long alley presented itself without an exit nor was there an old man or three legged goat to be found. Curly was dumbfounded as to what had happened to them, how could they have disappeared he wondered.

A strong gust of wind came up the alley and blew over Curly as he heard a loud bleating sound before it dissipated into the sky.

THE END